

did with President Obama in 2015 on fixing No Child Left Behind and in 2016 on 21st Century Cures and on other issues, that when a President elected by the people of the United States—whatever you may think of him—has a legitimate objective, you should bend over backward to try to meet that objective if you want a result.

As for the President, in this case President Trump, I would suggest that he should be as specific and reliable as President Obama was in 2015 when he told me he needed three things in order to sign a bill. When Congress passed a bill with those three things in it, even though it included some other things the President didn't like, he signed the law.

Since President Trump has made it clear that he will not sign any legislation to reopen the Federal Government without some increase in funding for border security, here are three options for where we could go from here to get out of this hole we have dug for ourselves.

No. 1, go small. Give the President the \$1.6 billion he asked for in this year's budget request, which the bipartisan Senate Appropriations Committee, which the Senator from Maine and I serve, approved. Throw in another \$1 billion to improve border security at ports of entry, which everyone agrees we need.

Even better, go bigger. Pass the bill that 54 Senators—I believe we are talking about the Collins-King bill—voted on last February, which combined a solution for children brought to the United States illegally, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals or DACA. The President said he was for that. Then add \$25 billion in appropriated funding for border security over 10 years. That is not \$5 billion or \$1.6 billion or \$3 billion; that is \$25 billion appropriated for border security, which 46 Democrats voted for last February. The bill failed only because of last-minute White House opposition.

Even better, go really big. Begin this new Congress by creating a legal immigration system that secures our borders and defines the status of those already here. In 2013, 68 U.S. Senators, including all 54 Democrats, voted for such a bill, but the House refused to take it up. That bill, which all 54 Democrats voted for, included over \$40 billion and many other provisions to secure our borders.

So there are three ways to turn this lemon into lemonade, so to speak—three ways to dig out of this hole we have dug for ourselves. Instead of saying that once we dig ourselves a hole, we should keep digging forever, climb out of it in a graceful way by solving a big problem.

Someone asked me in the hall recently: Well, why would President Trump agree to such a thing?

Why would he not agree to such a thing? I have said to the President on more than one occasion that when touring the White House, you can look

at the portraits of the Presidents. You see President Nixon, and what do you think? Nixon and China. You see President Reagan, and what do you think? Reagan and the Soviet Union. But Nixon was not always for a relationship with Communist China; he was opposed to it. Reagan was the biggest critic of the Soviet Union in our country. Yet the two of them took those credentials, and they tackled a big problem, and they made a historic contribution to this country.

I believe President Trump could and should do the same thing. We could go small or we could go a little bigger, and pass the Collins-King bill—or something close to it—that we voted for. I would like to see the President say: OK, we have a new Congress; we have divided government. I am the President who can actually make this happen. I believe the American people would trust me if I said that we were creating a comprehensive legal immigration system.

Get us unstuck from this partial government shutdown, and go real big on immigration. That could be President Trump's Nixon-to-China, Reagan-to-the-Berlin-Wall moment in history.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PORTMAN). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LANKFORD). Without objection, it is so ordered.

SENATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, today is a little like opening day here in the U.S. Senate. We have seen some of our colleagues—incumbents who were already elected—walk down this aisle, to be sworn in, after winning 6-year terms. We have also seen some new Members come in from all around the country who are from both parties. Just like every opening day, there is a certain sense of optimism in the air. I just went to a number of receptions for Democrats and Republicans alike, and people are talking about the need for us to work together.

We are also facing a new reality, and that is we have divided government now. Before, we had a Republican House and Senate and a Republican President. Now we have a Democratic-led House to go along with the Republican Senate and a Republican White House. We haven't had a divided government for a little while; yet our jobs don't change at all as our job is to figure out how to work together to get things done. Frankly, here in the U.S. Senate, we need 60 votes for almost anything, which requires a supermajority, which has always been the case. Really, there has been only one

way to accomplish things around here on behalf of the people we represent, which has been to figure out how to find that common ground. It is time to get back to doing that on some of these big issues. I would suggest to you that on issues like, maybe, healthcare and immigration, we have had a gridlock situation, where we just can't seem to figure out even how to get started.

I will say that in 2018, the year that just passed, we did make progress in some areas, and it is worth reflecting on that and talking about how that happened, because that would be the model for the future.

We made progress on combating the opioid epidemic that has gripped this country, and it is the worst public health crisis we have in this country now. In October, President Trump signed opioid legislation into law that contains a number of different ways to push back against this issue. In my home State of Ohio, it is the No. 1 cause of death now. Nationally, it is the No. 1 cause of death for those under age 50. We had over 70,000 people die in this country last year alone from opioid overdoses. So the President signed legislation into law that will help.

One piece of legislation is called the STOP Act. It is something that we worked on for 3 years. In fact, it came out of some work that we did on the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. I and the Presiding Officer here today are on the committee, and we are able to work together—Republicans and Democrats alike—and do deep investigations into issues that then result in good legislation. In this case, we found out that more people are dying of fentanyl overdoses—the most deadly of all of the drugs now—of synthetic opioids than of any other drug.

We found out that it comes in through the U.S. mail system, primarily, and from China. We are really doing virtually nothing to provide the screening to try to keep some of this poison out of our communities. So that is now in place. Just a couple of weeks ago, I also met with the Postmaster General and with the head of Customs and Border Protection—the two individuals who are the most responsible for its implementation—to talk about how we can more quickly implement that legislation to save lives.

The bill also includes some other legislation that we worked on for years. One is to remove an arbitrary cap on the ability of people to get treatment. Some treatment centers were capped at 16 beds just because they took Medicaid funding. That made no sense. There are some good treatment centers out there that were turning people away. These people are addicted. If they don't get into treatment, they are going to continue to have their addictions and continue to cause crimes and continue to break up families and cause all kinds of problems for our criminal justice system. So that is a

positive part of what has happened here.

We also passed legislation in that package to help care for pregnant and postpartum women who are addicted and for their children and for babies who are born with this neonatal abstinence syndrome—dependent on drugs, essentially—and to help get them through life.

Last year, we passed important legislation that is already having an enormous impact to push back on another topic that we studied in the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, which I talked about earlier. That is legislation that deals with the trafficking of women and children. So much of that has moved online. Our research indicates that most of it was happening, actually, on one website, called backpage. We wrote legislation that enabled the victims to go after some of these websites if they had been exploited but also to allow prosecutors, including the prosecutors in your States and your cities and your counties, to go after some of these groups online that were knowingly trafficking women and children.

As a result of that, we have made huge progress. It took 3 years of investigation and legislating to get there, but that legislation now, in its having become law, according to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, has resulted in substantial decreases in the online sex trafficking of women and children. Lives have been saved. Those who were not able to pursue God's purpose in life are now able to because no longer are they being trafficked.

In addition, the permanent subcommittee's report helped the Department of Justice indict this worst actor in the online trafficking arena, backpage, as well as its executives. We were able to shut down the website altogether because of that. So we have made progress.

The year 2018 was also the first year of the new Tax Code that has made American workers and American companies far more competitive. It is responsible, more than any other thing, for the fact that we not only have more jobs in this country and historically low unemployment numbers now but also higher wages. Over the past few months, we have seen where we have had, for the first time, really, in a decade and a half, rising wages relative to inflation so that people who are working hard and playing by the rules are feeling that they are getting ahead again. A couple of months ago, there was a 3-percent increase from the previous year. That is something you want to see happen continually, and this tax reform, because it encourages investment in jobs and expansion, is having that impact.

The year 2018 was also the year we provided more funding for our brave men and women in uniform who are out there protecting us every day. Our military was not able to do its job be-

cause we didn't have adequate resources. We were able to do that in 2018 on a bipartisan basis.

So there have been some examples of bipartisanship that have made a big difference. Again, we should look at those and determine what happened there. Why were we stuck on one issue; yet, on others, we were able to make progress? I would suggest to you that there are four or five other issues that are at the point at which they have enough bipartisan support that we should be able to get them done this year.

I know people say: Well, we are getting into the 2020 election. Folks, it is only 2019. We are only a couple of days into it. Let's not talk about the 2020 election. Let's not focus on what happens on the talk shows and what happens on the op-ed pages and what happens in terms of the red meat speeches being thrown out from both sides. Instead, let's focus on what we can do this year, in 2019—there is no election this year—to actually make progress on some of these issues. Some of them are ones that affect all of our constituents in very fundamental ways. Others, perhaps, are not as significant.

Right now, we have an opportunity to break this gridlock and to stop the partial government shutdown and to also make some reforms in the immigration system as we do it.

The appropriations process for funding our Federal Government is stuck right now. There are 7 bills out of 12 that have not been passed. Of those seven, six have been agreed to by this body and the other body. Republicans and Democrats alike have voted for them, so we should get them done.

As we try to figure out a way forward, we should also be sure that we do two things: Stop the partial government shutdown—which makes no sense, particularly for taxpayers, which I will explain in a second—and strengthen our border.

Of course we should strengthen the border. There are a lot of bad things happening on the border. One, of course, is people coming across illegally. That is something none of us should want to see. We want to see a legal process. I think it is true that pretty much everybody in this Chamber understands we have to have a secure border, and there is not a secure border now. Some of it requires new fencing. Some of it requires other kinds of barriers. Some of it requires more technology and more people to respond when somebody breaches a fence or a wall. We all know that. We know there has to be more funding provided there. We should be able to do that.

At the same time, we should also realize that with regard to government shutdowns, as I said earlier, they really don't accomplish much because we always go back and repay the workers who have not been working on behalf of all of us. In these shutdowns, taxpayers always end up having to pay more, not less.

With regard to the shutdown right now, I don't think it is political leverage in particular because I think that some of those who are more partisan on the other side of the aisle are happy to have it continue, thinking it is good for them politically. Let's take the politics out of it. Let's stop shutdowns altogether.

There is legislation that has been introduced called End Government Shutdowns. Actually, when the Presiding Officer was in the House of Representatives, he was one of the leaders on that and still supports this idea. The notion is, if you don't finish an appropriations bill or if a continuing resolution expires—which is short-term, temporary funding instead of an appropriations bill—instead of having a shutdown, what you do is continue spending from the previous year. Then slowly, over time—1 percent after 120 days, another 1 percent after 90 days, and so on—you reduce that funding to give the Appropriations Committee around here and our leadership some incentive to come to the table and resolve the issues.

I just don't think shutdowns work. I have never quite understood it. Again, from a taxpayer's perspective, I don't think it makes much sense.

We are going to reintroduce the End Government Shutdowns bill again next week. It has been bipartisan in the past. I hope it will be bipartisan next week when we reintroduce it. Let's get that done. At the same time, let's figure out ways to have more security at our borders. Everybody agrees with that. I hope we can find a way to get to some common ground.

When we got into this issue last year, along with Senators THUNE and MORAN, I introduced legislation that would provide \$25 billion over a 5-year period to support this plan for a more secure border, including the plan from the Trump administration, while at the same time providing legal certainty to those young people who came to the United States illegally as children through no fault of their own. Some have called these children, who are now young people, part of the DACA Program. You have heard that word, D-A-C-A, DACA. These are people who came here as kids without going through the proper channels. They shouldn't be punished for that, so let's codify the administrative action that has been taken, and let's combine that with the funding. To me, that seems to be one where Republicans and Democrats could each find some opportunity for a victory. The win-win would then allow us to reopen the government and to move ahead with broader immigration reform, having had a little bit of success on at least one small part of the immigration issues we face. I think this is an example where, if both sides can give a little, we won't have a shutdown anymore, and we can move ahead on some other legislation.

I want to talk about some of those other priorities that we could easily

address this year because they are bipartisan. In some cases, they had already been worked on for years, and in other cases, for months. Frankly, just before we broke for the holidays, we came close to passing some of those.

One is for us to reform the tax collection agency, the IRS. Everybody should want to do this because, once again, the IRS is not serving taxpayers as they should. I say “once again” because about 20 years ago, Congress took on this task and formed a commission. Actually, I was co-chair of it with Senator Bob Kerrey. We passed legislation to improve the customer service of the IRS but also to give them more money for technology so they could do a better job with regard to enforcing the tax laws.

At that time, the IRS was in really tough shape. They weren’t answering the phone. When they did, they weren’t providing right information. The Agency suffered from wasteful spending, from low workforce morale, and from a lack of leadership and strategic direction. Guess what. That is happening again—all of those things.

We now have a new Commissioner who has just been confirmed. I am very hopeful he will make a difference there, but he needs our help legislatively—give him some tools to use. This new Commissioner, along with his new team, is eager to have those reforms. They think it is a prime opportunity to update what happens at the IRS and to be sure it is serving taxpayers better.

My hope is that calls will begin to be answered again and that we will get correct answers when we call to find an answer to a tax law question. We have now simplified the tax law in certain ways. We have also made it more complicated in other ways with this new tax reform legislation, so there are a lot of questions out there. Our legislation would be very helpful.

By the way, 20 years ago, we decided to include an independent appeal of an IRS decision. It is very important. To me, it is sort of a fundamental right. If the IRS is saying you are wrong about something, you should have the ability to appeal it and to have an independent forum.

Over the last 10 years or so, the IRS has kind of moved away from that. The appeals have declined because the IRS has chosen to settle a lot of cases in tax court, costing taxpayers a lot more money. Our legislation, which has been bipartisan, will help to create a new, independent appeals process. The Commissioner supports that. It is a way to ensure we have, frankly, more faith and confidence in the IRS, having that independent appeal.

We also give more structure to what is called the IRS Oversight Board. This was established 20 years ago. It worked for a while. It hasn’t worked for the past 10 years. It is basically not in existence anymore. So we said: Let’s establish this very simply so that it focuses on long-term, strategic goals for

the Agency, so it doesn’t again fall back into the situation it is in now, with bad technology, bad customer service, and so on, and let’s set up this oversight board in the right way.

Senator BEN CARDIN and I have introduced legislation called the Protecting Taxpayers Act. We almost got it done at the end of the year last year, just a few weeks ago. My hope is that we can get this legislation up and get it passed very, very quickly. We have already had hearings on it in the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Taxation and IRS Oversight, which I chair. My hope is that we can get that to a final vote very soon.

Another opportunity we have is to expand retirement savings. That is something which is very important to a lot of my constituents who are finding themselves in a situation where they thought they had saved enough, but they hadn’t. People are living longer, healthier lives, and unfortunately the amount they have saved in their IRA or their 401(k) or what they have in their pension plan is not enough for them to have a secure retirement.

We have done this in the past. Again, we have worked together in a bipartisan way over the years to try to increase what people can save for their own retirement. In fact, Senator CARDIN, a Democrat from Maryland, and I have worked together in a bipartisan way going back a couple of decades. We had three different bills that expanded how much you could put away in a 401(k) or an IRA and have catchup contributions if you are over 50 and changing the rules to make it easier for small businesses to provide plans. Unfortunately, it is time to do that again so that people can set more aside for their golden years and have more peace of mind in retirement.

The numbers are pretty interesting. After our three pieces of legislation back in 1997, 2001, and 2006, we did see more savings. In fact, nationwide, growth of 401(k)s and other defined contribution plan savings, IRA savings, expanded pretty dramatically. There has been a 179-percent increase in 401(k)s in the last 17, 18 years and a 254-percent increase in IRAs. So we have shown that by passing legislation that provides more opportunity for people to save for their own retirement, more money is being put in.

However, having had those successes in moving retirement savings from about \$11 trillion in 2001 to \$28 trillion today, there is still a lot more to be done. My generation, the baby boom generation, just isn’t saving enough for their retirement, and the same is true with the succeeding generation. Young people aren’t putting enough aside, and we need to give them that incentive to do more because, frankly, that is a much more effective way for us to improve their chances of having a secure retirement, not depending solely on Social Security, and also to help our economy, because more savings is a

good thing for our private sector economy.

Even today, only just over half of the employees who work in private companies have a company plan. I think they should all have one. We should make it so easy that every company says: You know what, you come work for me, and I am going to provide you with a 401(k).

Maybe it is a simple plan, which is something we want to work on to try to create a new, very simple plan for small businesses because a lot of small businesses don’t have the professionals, the H.R. people—the human resources people—to do it. That is part of what we have in our legislation. We need to do more to help part-time workers in particular. We need to do more to ensure that the smallest businesses have an opportunity to have savings plans.

Before the end of last year, just a couple of weeks ago, we introduced this legislation. It is called Portman-Cardin 2.0—the Retirement Security & Savings Act. It has more than 50 provisions. It is a culmination of many years of work with various stakeholders to come up with stuff that makes sense.

Among other things, it establishes new automatic enrollment safe harbors. It does raise the catchup contribution limits. It allows individuals to make additional catchup contributions after age 60. It would also expand the saver’s credit for low-income families and make that refundable. To ensure that Americans don’t outlive their savings, the bill exempts any savers with less than \$100,000 in aggregate savings from the currently required minimum distributions from their 401(k) or IRA. Right now, at age 70½, you have to start taking it out. For many people who are working into their seventies, this makes no sense at all. You have worked your whole life. You are still working into your seventies, as my dad was, and you are told: You have to start taking money from your retirement account, or we are going to penalize you. Our legislation says that if you have less than \$100,000 in savings, you shouldn’t be subject to the minimum requirements at all. For others, we raised it from 70½ up to 75 years old over time to ensure that those who are in their seventies don’t start depleting their retirement accounts when they may well need them, as they are, again, living longer and longer lives.

Let’s continue our work to focus on helping people save for their own retirement. That is something we can do on a bipartisan basis.

We also have a little issue that is growing dramatically with regard to defined retirement plans, defined benefit plans—not defined contribution plans, like the 401(k)—and specifically what are called multiemployer plans. You may have heard about this, but if you haven’t, you probably will if we don’t do something because it looks like, by the year 2025, the Federal Insurance program called the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation will go

insolvent because of these plans not being properly funded.

Some of these plans are very big. There are about 60,000 people in the State of Ohio who are in one of these plans, including the Central States plan. If it goes belly-up, it will result in the PBGC—the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation—going belly-up. That insolvency would then create problems for all plans, including single-employer plans, not just these multiemployer plans we are talking about.

We need a bipartisan solution for that. We came close to it last year. We had a joint select committee formed to look at it. Again, that should be bipartisan—really, nonpartisan. If we don't solve this problem, it is going to have a big impact on our economy because not only does the Federal guaranty program go bankrupt, but a lot of businesses that rely on that are going to go bankrupt as well.

Finally, to continue our progress in combating the opioid epidemic, which we talked about earlier, we need to take the next step. There is new legislation called the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act 2.0, referring to the same legislation, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, CARA, which was passed here in this body 2½ years ago. That legislation is to do more in terms of treatment, recovery, and specifically prevention.

It also deals with this issue that we don't have effective drug-monitoring programs back in our States. Often, if someone gets a prescription for opioids, they wouldn't know whether that person already had that prescription. They also don't know if somebody has crossed the State line. In my State of Ohio, people might cross over to Michigan or Indiana or Kentucky or West Virginia, as they do—all States that have opioid problems, as well—and get a prescription filled there, and we in Ohio don't know it is a doubling up of prescriptions when they go to a pharmacy in Ohio. We need to work better to ensure that we have an interstate system. That is in this legislation.

We also have a limitation on prescriptions for acute pain. This is based on the Centers for Disease Control—the CDC—guidelines. They tell you that after 3 days of taking opioids for acute pain, it is far more likely that you are going to become addicted to pain medication. Obviously, this is a huge problem that we want to stop. So much of this opioid addiction—even the fentanyl addiction we have now, the synthetic opioids coming in—started with prescription drugs. It often started with legally prescribed prescription drugs.

Again, this says that for those who are prescribed drugs after a surgery, let's say for acute pain—not chronic pain, not cancer, but acute pain—there should be a 3-day limit. This is based on CDC research that has been done.

It is also based on the research being done by the FDA about how pain medication works. They say opioid medica-

tion may be helpful for somebody that has a serious pain issue after an operation, say, acute pain. But after the first couple of days, it is much more likely to be handled through something less dangerous, like ibuprofen. So there is not a need to have a continual use of opioids. Getting a 3-day national limit in place alone would have a huge impact on overdoses going forward, because it starts with an addiction and leads to the overdoses. For over 70,000 Americans last year, this led to not just an overdose but to overdose deaths—the No. 1 cause of death among people under 50 in our country today. It also requires hospitals and doctors to not just use these prescription drug monitoring programs but to share that data to prevent people from cheating the system and getting prescription drugs they shouldn't be getting.

Around the holidays, the New York Times did an interesting three-part study on the issue of addiction. I found it very helpful and commend it to you. It is about the science of addiction and some simple information about how these drugs essentially hijack your brain. This is a 2-page foldout that was in the New York Times just before Christmas. It goes through the various stages—from the gateway to opioids we talked about earlier, often from prescription drugs, tolerance and withdrawal symptoms, addiction, treatment, relapse, and recovery. If you haven't seen it, you can find it online. I would recommend it. It is in very simple language—talking to addicts, talking to experts, and giving people a simple sense of what happens here and what we can do to address it.

What we can do is much better on the prevention side—again, more information out there on understanding how dangerous these drugs are, but, second, getting people who are already addicted into treatment. This is in everyone's interest, including our law enforcement officials, who are tired of arresting the same people again and again for the same crimes, usually property crimes associated with paying for their habit—the No. 1 cause of crime in my State of Ohio. But it is also incredibly important for our families who are being broken apart and for so many of our healthcare systems, emergency rooms, and neonatal units in hospitals which are overwhelmed with these babies with neonatal abstinence syndrome. There is a huge cost and impact of that on individuals, on families, and on taxpayers.

It is something that is affecting employers in big ways now. When I look at the numbers in terms of what is happening in our economy, the biggest issue in terms of workforce is people who are not in the workforce at all anymore. That is at historically high levels. They aren't even applying for jobs. Among men, it is probably at historic levels. On men and women combined, you would have to go back to the late 1970s to see such low levels of participation in the workforce, when

we had double-digit unemployment, double-digit interest rates, and double-digit inflation. We don't want that again. When you look at why these people aren't working, it is dramatic how many of these people are addicted, and opioids is driving these numbers at a time when there should be many more people engaging in the workforce. The jobs are there. The jobs are open and not being filled. Often, people can't pass the drug test if they are looking, because of their opioid addiction. So it is affecting us in every way, including our economy and workforce.

To address these issues, this CARA 2.0 legislation will help, as will the legislation we passed last year with regard to the synthetic opioids and with regard to providing more treatment for people. If we keep up these efforts and continue to pass legislation that addresses the specific problems out there, I think this year, 2019, we will see the tide turning. We will see fewer addictions. We will see fewer deaths from overdoses. We will see more families not broken apart but coming back together. We will see our communities begin to heal because we are beginning to make progress. It is not showing up in all the numbers yet, but I see it back home with regard to individual regions and cities and with regard to communities doing an awesome job, with volunteers coming together and using some of the tools we have been giving them to have a more effective prevention campaign and also to get people into treatment. Where that is working, they are making a huge difference. So I am hopeful that in 2019, if we can keep this up, on a bipartisan basis, we will be able to see this progress be manifested in our communities.

There is plenty more to be done this year. I joined a bipartisan group of colleagues on the Senate floor just before the holidays, calling on the Senate to pass the Restore Our Parks Act, which is to deal with the \$12 billion maintenance backlog at our national parks. Things are falling apart—roads, bridges, water systems—and it is a shame because it is really a debt that is owed. We aren't keeping up because our annual budget doesn't provide money for these so-called capital expenses. Yet, if we don't deal with them, it becomes far more expensive. If the roof isn't fixed because it is too expensive, what happens? You have the entire building—as is happening at one of our great parks in Ohio—which has to be rebuilt at a huge cost to the taxpayer. So there is an opportunity here—again, on a bipartisan way—to deal with this long overdue maintenance at our national parks. The administration supports it, our Energy and Natural Resources Committee has voted it out of committee with a strong bipartisan vote. The House of Representatives supports it on a bipartisan basis. Let's get it done.

There has also been talk of a major infrastructure compromise. We need

that. Our roads and bridges are crumbling, generally, not just at our parks. We need an infrastructure bill. Maybe the parks bill will be the start of that. We will see if that can be something where we can find compromise.

Of course, we also have to make progress on healthcare. The costs of healthcare are out of control. I know Senator ALEXANDER talked about this earlier on the floor today, but there are so many opportunities for us to improve our healthcare system and the cost and the quality of that system. It is something that has been very difficult and very partisan. It has been difficult for us to make any progress on that, but I think we have to put our partisan blinders away and say: How can we come up with sensible solutions? Some have talked about it today on the floor. Senator COLLINS, who was here earlier today as Presiding Officer, has specific legislation to have these high-risk pools in States—it has worked in her State of Maine, and it can work nationally—to be sure that we are reducing the cost for everybody for their premiums, deductibles, and copays.

I think the American people are looking for wins right now. I think it would help our country to have some of these wins. I think there are some great examples I have presented today of some pretty easy wins, of some low-hanging fruit—whether it is dealing with these issues that we are left with here with the government shutdown, making some small steps forward on immigration reform right away, or whether it is low-hanging fruit like the reform of the Internal Revenue Service, the retirement savings expansion, so people can save more for retirement, and this idea that we can begin to turn the tide on the opioid epidemic, which has gripped our country. It doesn't have to be a year of gridlock. It can be a year of progress.

My hope is that on this opening day, as Members are walking down the aisle and are here with their families and celebrating and the optimism of opening day and thinking that hope springs eternal, this can be a good season. This can be a good year. This can be a year where we focus on what is best for the people we represent and focus on what is best for our country. If we do that, I think we will make a difference, and I think we will look back and realize that it doesn't have to be this way.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. CAPITO). The majority whip.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, as we begin a new Congress, it is always an exciting time. There are a lot of families and friends here. Our Members and colleagues were sworn in earlier today. It represents a new beginning—obviously, a time when there is hope and optimism that we can come together

and do some good things for the people we represent in our respective States and for our country. That is the way we approach this new session of Congress.

There is a lot I think we can do. We can find some common ground and work together. Obviously, we have to deal with the issues of last year's business before we can start this business of this new year.

Last year's business is incomplete. We are almost 2 weeks into a partial government shutdown because Democrats don't want to fund increased security for the border. Border security is a national security requirement. Every Member of Congress, Democrat or Republican, should take seriously our responsibility to protect our Nation by ensuring that our borders are secure. At one time Democrats understood that.

In 2006, the Democratic leader and the ranking member of the Senate Judiciary Committee voted for legislation to authorize a border fence. They were joined in that vote by then-Senators Biden, Clinton, and Obama. In 2013, every Senate Democrat supported legislation requiring the completion of a 700-mile fence along our southern border. This legislation would have provided \$46 billion for border security and \$8 billion specifically for the wall.

Nearly every Senate Democrat supported \$25 billion in border security funding just last February—just recently, less than 1 year ago. Yet today, Democrats would rather keep part of the government shut down than provide the money needed to secure our borders. The question is, What has changed?

Our national security situation certainly hasn't changed. Our borders are not sufficiently secure, and as we have seen, they are a target for illegal entry. Over the past year, illegal border crossing apprehensions have shot up by more than 30 percent. The holes in our border security leave us susceptible to illegal entry by gang members, human traffickers, drug dealers, terrorists, and weapons traffickers. The Democrats are refusing to budge on sorely needed border security funding. Why? I think that is a fair question.

It is, I think, because Democrats are reluctant to oppose the far-left wing of their party, which increasingly seems to be advancing this preposterous notion that we really don't need to secure our borders at all. Every nation has to secure its borders. A country without borders really isn't a country. Preventing dangerous individuals and goods from entering is an essential part of every country's security, and as my Democratic colleagues have proved in the past, they know this, which is why they voted that way in previous sessions of Congress, as recently as last year.

I hope they will think better of this government shutdown and decide that their national security obligations are more important than catering to the

far-left wing of their party. It is time to fund our border security and to end this shutdown. It simply requires sides to come together to find that common ground and to do what is in our country's best interests and the best interests of the American people; that is, to make sure that our country has a secure border and that we discourage people from coming here illegally and encourage them to come through legal means.

I had the opportunity a couple of weeks ago in my State of South Dakota to welcome into our State and country 99 new citizens from 33 countries around the world. They came here the legal way. They went through the process and followed our rules, followed our laws. That is what we want to encourage more of.

What we don't need more of are people coming into this country illegally and presenting the types of threats I mentioned earlier—anytime we have that many people, in a mass way, migrating across our border. I hope and sincerely believe that as a Congress, as a Senate working with this President—who has made this a big priority for his administration—it is an important priority for our country and a requirement and obligation that I think we all have as U.S. Senators, first and foremost, to protect our country and to protect the American people. If we don't get that right, the rest is really just conversation.

I hope the Democrats will come to the conclusion that their statements in the past and their votes in the past in support of border security are the right way to proceed and will continue in that tradition we have had in the country in the past in which, on these important issues, both sides come together and work to find common ground.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOZMAN). The majority leader.

TRIBUTE TO MICKEY MILLER

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, this month my friend Mickey Miller will retire from Nolin Rural Electric Cooperative Corporation, Nolin RECC, after 45 years at the organization, including more than a quarter century as its president and CEO. Mickey has dedicated his career to providing reliable, cost-effective energy services to Kentuckians in nine counties with integrity and innovation. I would like to take a moment to reflect on his remarkable career in our Commonwealth.

From LaRue County, Mickey graduated from the University of Kentucky with a degree in agriculture economics and marketing. During his time at Nolin RECC, Mickey has championed a great deal of growth and advancement. In fact, the cooperative's membership has more than tripled, providing vital services to Kentucky families and employers and fueling development in the region.